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ABSTRACT

Tested is the hypothesis that admission offices of colleges offering two-year degrees will be less likely to reflect a marketing orientation in their responses to prospective students than colleges and universities offering more advanced degrees. Information sent by 858 institutions of higher education to potential students is described and classified. Chi square analysis of data verified the hypothesis. It is noted that two-year colleges and other schools sent catalogues, American College Testing program packets, Basic Grant data, assorted brochures, career development brochures, or financial aid brochures. The distinguishing factors seemed to surface in the format and design of the materials sent: two-year schools tended to be basic in their printed form, whereas four-year colleges' brochures and catalogues tended to be more extensive, more colorful, and unique in format. Findings indicate that admissions offices of colleges and universities offering two-year degrees are far less likely to exhibit a marketing orientation in their replies to prospective students than admissions offices at academic institutions offering four-year and more advanced degrees. It is suggested that two-year institutions should invest more in marketing in order to compete with the marketing expertise of four-year and higher degree institutions and the future declining enrollment predicted to affect postsecondary education. Tables include marketing and non-marketing materials sent by American colleges and universities and statistics on the likelihood of two-year vs. four-year colleges to disseminate specific types of information to prospective students. (LC)

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RESPONSES TO A PRESPECTIVE STUDENT BY ADMISSIONS OFFICES OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This report tests the hypothesis that admission offices of colleges offering two year degrees will be less likely to reflect a marketing orientation in their responses to prospective students than colleges and universities offering more advanced degrees. Information sent by eight hundred and fifty-eight institutions of higher education to potential students is described and classified. Chi square analysis of data established verification of hypothesis. Reasons for the differences in responses are discussed along with the value of the findings to two year colleges.

RESPONSES TO A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT BY ADMISSIONS OFFICES OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Lack of Systematic Research of Marketing Procedures Used by Admissions Offices

The admissions office of a college or university provides a key function in the marketing of education. It is responsible for establishing an applicant pool from which quality students may be selected (Kotler 1978). Marketing specialists have recommended methods that an admissions officer can use to enhance public awareness of institutional courses and programs. Technical procedures to present an accurate image which will appeal to appropriate classifications of students have been described. Colleges have been encouraged to assess the educational needs of their communities and provide programs to satisfy them. In short, the use of marketing procedures by educational institutions is currently being encouraged. (Fram, 1973; Gorman, 1974; Hertling, 1973; Huddleston, 1975; Krachenberg, 1972).

However, little systematic research is available to show the degree to which marketing techniques are used by admissions officers in general. Reports on assorted individual institutional procedures are enlightening and useful. But, information regarding the collective marketing efforts of colleges and universities could be more useful.

Awareness of the kinds of institutions using marketing procedures and the extent to which they are used would enable marketing specialists to focus attention in areas of greatest need.

Goals of this Investigation

This report will show the degree to which marketing procedures are used by two year colleges and institutions offering more advanced degrees. Conclusions will be based upon an analysis of the way in which admissions offices respond to prospective students. A basic assumption of this study is that the activities of admissions offices reflect the general marketing orientation of academic institutions. That assumption is grounded in the fact that most educational bureaucracies delegate the responsibility for recruiting and monitoring enrollment to their admissions offices.

Findings from this study will describe the kind of materials sent to prospective students by admissions offices, distinguish between marketing and non-marketing classifications of items sent, and indicate the rate of differences in materials disseminated by two year colleges and other insittutions.

The most specific goal of this investigation will be to test the hypothesis that admissions offices of colleges offering two year degrees are less likely to reflect a marketing orientation in their responses to prospective students than colleges and universities offering more advanced degrees.

This hypothesis is not generated from a general theory. Rather, it is built upon several empirical indicators. During recent decades

the creation of two year colleges has advanced at a more rapid pace than the creation of colleges offering more advanced degrees. (Education Directory 1977-1978). Their expansion has presented lower division students with a tempting alternative to four year degree schools. Most institutions offering advanced degrees are prevented from offering two year terminal degrees. And, students do see the two year degree as more valuable than merely two years of credit hours (Hazard and Bradford, 1978). There is a degree to be gained with nothing to lose by beginning one's academic career at a two year college.

Tuition rates at two year degree colleges tend to be lower than at other colleges. And, students today are more apt to view higher education as an investment in their future. (Egler, 1974; Leister, 1976). When credits earned at a two year college are perceived as being just as valuable as credits earned at institutions which cost more to attend, it is economically sensible to attend the least expensive college.

These factors have made the two year college more appealing for many students than the four year school. Consequently, we might expect academic institutions offering higher degrees to be experiencing constraints on drawing lower division students and consequently more readily adopting marketing procedures than two year colleges.

Also, institutions offering advanced degrees tend to be larger, better financed per student, and supported by a staff more thoroughly trained in sophisticated marketing procedures. The availability of these resources enhance the probability that such schools will bring these resources to bear upon a problem of insufficient enrollments.

Marketing procedures are not indigenous to educational organizations. In fact they are usually accepted by faculties and administrations as a tolerable means to avoid economic collapse. For most educators the concept of marketing is closely associated with "selling". And, the idea of "selling" an education is not acceptable within the framwork of traditional academic thought. Dominant educational values demand that higher learning be a privlege granted to deserving students, not placed in the realm of commodities. Several articles are in print to clarify the distinctions between the public service orientation of marketing in contrast with the stronger profit motivation of selling. Never the less, because of tradition, one might expect marketing procedures to be first accepted by those educational institutions which are most pressed by economic difficulties and which have the greatest capability to develop and use marketing procedures. (West, 1974; Ihlanfeldt, 1975).

Research Procedures

Data collection

Eight hundred and fifty-eight accredited colleges and universities were randomly selected from the institutions listed in the 1977-1978 edition of the Education Directory. The sample included five hundred and forty-two colleges offering four year and graduates degrees and three hundred and sixteen two year colleges.

A letter requesting information was sent to each school. It was sent by a student who specified that he would soon be living in the

area and attending a college or university there. Information about the college was requested so that the student could determine if it was the appropriate school for him.

Letters were sent on November 1, 1978. Responses were gathered over a six month period ending April 30, 1979. Eighty-eight percent of all replies were received within two months after sending the letters. The twelve percent which were received during the last four months of the survey, were practically all follow-up mailings from colleges which had initially answered during the first two months. The average school responded twice. One college responded with seventeen seperate mailings and a phone call. Only nine schools made phone calls.

Eighty-eight percent of the two year colleges answered. Ninety-one percent of the academic institutions offering higher degrees replied.

Data Analysis

Preliminary sorting of five hundred pieces of mail revealed seventeen basic classifications of material. Each category was distinguished as having marketing or non-marketing characteristics depending upon the way in which they promoted their product through emphasizing its quality, location, and cost. (See Kotler, 1975, 1978; Baratta, 1978; Hugstad, 1975; Fram, 1973; Gorman, 1974; Krachenberg, 1972, and Buchanan, 1974 for guidelines for the distinctions drawn here between marketing and non-marketing materials.)

Product

Marketing materials presented a concise clear view of the kinds of programs and courses offered. Such information was not hidden within a catalogue that the student would be required to examine in detail in

order to discover whether or not programs appropriate for him were available. Rather, marketing information on programs and their value to the student were presented in an attractive easy to discover form within brochures which boldly outlined the kinds of programs offered and why they would be of considerable economic or self-developing value to the student.

Price

Traditional materials on financial aid which simply presented the kinds of assistance available were not classified as marketing materials. Colleges were reflecting a marketing orientation when their discussion of costs were tied into the potential return the student could expect from his college investment, or when the information on financial assistance was presented in such a way that it explained in simple persuasive terms how the student could manage to complete his education and balance his budget while doing so. As Buchanan and Barksdale (1974) have noted, most institutions are unable to easily adapt their tuition and other charges to meet competition. Consequently, classification of financial aid information as marketing or non-marketing depended to quite an extent upon the way in which the explaination of costs was presented.

Place

Some colleges said very little about the advantages of their location or the extra curricular activities which made it a desirable place to live and go to college. Those which emphasized the enjoyable experience the student would have through attending "that" school rather than others, and those which promoted the characteristics of their city or surrounding countryside were deemed to be exhibiting a marketing orientation.

Promotion

Colleges which sent little other than the necessary materials for a student to procede through the application and enrollment process were not considered to be using marketing procedures. However, when personal letters or brochures emphasized the personal attention the student could expect, or placed the school in a most favorable light, or appealed directly to the interests of persons the age of the average college enrollee, the school was promoting itself. Information which was colorful, quick to read, and informative regarding the philosophy of the institution so that a distinct image of its unique position among academic institutions was portrayed, a marketing orientation was being displayed.

Table I distinguishes between marketing and non-marketing materials.

TABLE I

MARKETING AND NON-MARKETING MATERIALS
SENT BY AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Marketing	Non-Marketing
Personal Letters	Schedules of Classes
School Personalized Booklets	Catalogues
School Personalized Brochures	Financial Aid Information
Paid Return Reply Cards	Admission Forms
Letters to Parents	General Greeting Letters
Events Advertisments	ACT and BEO Information
Program, Career and Assorted Brochures	
General Information Brochures	

There were several overlaps between marketing and non-marketing materials within each classification. For example, considerable variation was noted in the characteristics of financial aid materials sent. The majority were colorless, compact factual presentations of information. However, some were unique in design and format and seemed specifically aimed to attract the students interest and attention--designed for promotional purposes. And, not all events advertisments were good examples of marketing materials. However, in every research project some categories must be collapsed in order to avoid an absurd degree of complexity. The lines drawn seem most appropriate considering the nature of the project and its objectives.

Materials sent by colleges were systematically sorted. Data concerning characteristics of institutions and types of articles sent were processed. A frequency distribution and cross tabulation of selected variables were acquired. Chi square analysis of data was performed to determine the significance of differences in the types of materials sent by two year colleges and other academic institutions.

Discussion of Findings

Table II indicates the percentage of colleges that sent each classification of items. Percentages of materials sent by colleges offering two year degrees are distinguished from those offering four year and graduate degrees. That table also indicates the results of chi-square analysis of the differences in the likelihood of the two classification of academic institutions to send each type of material.

Class schedules were the only item that two year colleges were significantly more likely than other schools to send. Most class schedules were compactions of information regarding specific times that classes were held. They were usually printed microscopically in black and white in newspaper form or mimeographed with little other information included. Those few which did have a decorative format were usually from four year colleges. Sometimes their class schedule was part of a copy of the school paper so that in addition to the schedule they were sending personalized information concerning the school.

Approximately the same percentage of two year and other schools sent catalogues, ACT packets, BEO grant data, assorted brochures, career development brochures or financial aid brochures.

Catalogues tended to be equally nondescript whether sent by two year or other colleges. Essentially they consist of intricate descriptions of the various courses and degree programs offered by a school. However, those few with unique formats were exclusively produced by colleges offering four year and graduate degrees. For example, some were printed in the form of a paperback novel. One had a cover which made it appear to be made from Levi jeans.

ACT packets and BEO (Basic Educational Opportunity) grant data are standardized sets of information. They are sent to facilitate the student's completion of essential steps to enrollment. Such materials would serve to move a student one more step toward college admission in general--but not toward any specific school. These packets are heavy and constitute considerable additional postal expense if sent to every student upon their initial inquiry.

TABLE II

LIKELIHOOD OF TWO YEAR COLLEGES VS COLLEGES OFFERING HIGHER DEGREES TO DISSEMINATE SPECIFIC TYPES OF INFORMATION TO A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT

Probability of Sending	Type of Information	Marketing vs Non-Marketing	Percent of Responses	
			Two Year	Higher
Two Year* Much less Likely	Letter to Parents***	Marketing	0.0	2.6
	Paid Return Reply	Marketing	7.8	29.6
	School Personalized Brochure	Marketing	4.9	15.3
	Personal Letter	Marketing	18.6	48.7
	School Personalized Booklet	Marketing	16.9	31.7
Two Year** Less Likely	Events Advertisment	Marketing	3.6	8.2
	General Greeting Letter	Non-Marketing	8.5	17.3
	Program Brochure	Marketing	5.5	10.8
	General Information Brochure	Marketing	17.9	27.5
	Application Form	Non-Marketing	52.8	67.7
No Significant Difference	ACT Packet	Non-Marketing	2.6	3.2
	Assorted Brochures	Marketing	5.2	6.3
	Financial Aid Information	Non-Marketing	39.7	47.4
	Career Development***	Marketing	1.6	0.8
	BEO Grant Data	Non-Marketing	2.6	1.1
	Catalogue	Non-Marketing	52.5	42.6
Two Year** More Likely				
Two Year* Much More Likely	Schedule of Classes	Non-Marketing	28.7	11.9

Probability refers to likelihood of sending type of information listed

*Higher significant difference=less than .01

**Moderate significant difference= .1 to .01

*** Inadequate data base for reliable chi-square test of significance

Assorted brochures included such things as religious tracts, expressions of political positions, descriptions of local senic attractions, etc. This category does not include brochures which provide information which would enable the prospective student to discern programs or courses offered by the school. They usually reflected the philosophy of the institution and sometimes were purely propagandizing pamplets.

Distinctions between financial aid brochures were notable. Two year colleges tended to send standardized information booklets, or locally constructed black on white information sheets. Other schools were more likely to have a unique design. Some were printed to look like currency. The outside informed the prospective student that the route to getting through college with financial ease was to be found inside.

Schools offering advanced degrees were substantially more likely to send general information brochures, application forms, general greeting letters, and invitations to events.

General information brochures include short summaries of many essential things that the prospective student should know about tuition, housing, financial aid, programs, etc. These were often printed in compact form on rather plain paper. But, those from four year colleges tended to be more colorful and often with a unique format. For example, some were indexed so that the student could quickly locate data on financial assistance, programs, etc. These brochures were often sent rather than a catalogue. Sometimes a part of this pamplet would indicate that the catalogue could be ordered for a specific fee.

Just over half of the two year colleges sent application forms, while two thirds of the other schools included them. They varied from simple one page forms with no request for an application fee to complex forms

several pages long requesting considerable personal information and charging fees as high as $35.

Little difference in format was noted between levels of schools sending general greeting letters. They began "Dear Friend," or "Dear Student;" and expressed a friendly but formalized welcome. Two year colleges were only half as likely to include one.

Students were sometimes invited to attend special "college days" when something like an open house is held. Some invitations were for dances, plays, or sporting events. They were often accompanied by a personal or general greeting letter which requested that the student get in touch with a specific individual on campus while visiting the school.

School personalized booklets and brochures, return reply cards, letters to parents, and personal letters were much less likely to be sent by two year colleges than other insitiutions.

In school personalized booklets and brochures considerable space was devoted to full color portrayal of the beauty of the local area, highly attractive young men and women in enjoyable interaction or comtemplation, and artistic poetic symbols to be associated with the college. There was little information that could not be expressed in bold print. But, that information was carefully selected to present a specific image of the school---the "position" of the school. For example, a school which claimed to encourage student creativity included a poster sized brochure portraying a gull in free flight with the school name written in a free flowing form as a caption. One booklet designed to "light up the student's life" was printed in the form of a large matchbook. Inside, colorful pictures indicated why other schools could not "match" their quality education or glamorous student life.

Postage paid return reply cards were often inserted within a school personalized booklet, or included with a personal letter which included little other information. They were generally designed to determine how serious the student was about attending the school. With the reply card the student could request several specific types of information, make an appointment for consultation or arrange for a telephone interview.

Letters to parents usually appealed to financial interests, concerns for a quality education and safety. Such letters assured parents that the campus was free from turmoil and strife and that school events were monitored. The institution's concern for providing programs which would result in employment was usually emphasized.

Personal letters were first class mail items with a greeting which addressed the student by name. Sometimes they were totally hand written. Almost invariable they expressed admiration for the student's wisdom in considering their college.

They told of a strong student orientation by both faculty and administration. Low student-professor ratios were emphasized. The student was assured that he could receive very personal attention if he should be intelligent enough to select their campus.

The above findings indicate that admissions offices of colleges and universities offering two year degrees are far less likely to exhibit a marketing orientation in their replies to prospective students than admissions offices at academic institutions offering four year and more advanced degrees.

Importance of this Study to Two Year Colleges

As a result of the continued marketing orientation by academic institutions offering four year and higher degrees, two year colleges may expect to experience greater difficulty enrolling undergraduate students.

At the present time many marketing techniques have an unsophisticated quality which might be associated with a "hard sell." For example, in response to a phone call from one four year college the student who sent the letters replied, "I have discussed the matter with my parents and have chosen to attend another college." The admissions officer replied, "You aren't going to let your parents tell you where to go, are you?" However, such crude over selling was not common. And, with time one may expect a careful refinement of marketing procedures.

Materials from many colleges and universities expressed a notable concern to explain honestly to students the value of an education at their school and to seek an awareness of the needs of students. This reflects the most basic value of educational marketing. That is, marketing in education is built on the value of determining student needs and satisfying them, rather than simply seeking to increase enrollments through persuading students to attend a specific school. As this value becomes more a part of educational marketing procedures, four year colleges will possess highly accurate information concerning the needs of students within their drawing area and continually become more able to offer programs designed to meet those needs. As they become more adept, they will draw students away from two year colleges.

Information gathered in this study makes possible a monitoring of the progression of all institutions toward the development of improved marketing techniques. Most important to two year colleges, such monitoring will facilitate the creation of marketing practices which will enable them to keep pace with the efforts of academic institutions offering higher degrees so that they will not lose the advantage they now hold in drawing lower division students.

Several studies point out that two year colleges must worry about the effect of the decline of high school graduates upon their enrollments (Englehart, 1973; Finch and Tantham, 1975; Parker, 1977). This study shows that administrators of two year colleges must also become more conscious of the fact that increasingly effective marketing techniques employed by four year institutions will also diminish the population of students that two year colleges have become accostomed to receiving.

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